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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000132

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR I2

SUBJECT: BASRAH'S NEW SECURITY CHIEF - FIRST IMPRESSION

REF: (A) BASRAH 112; (B) BASRAH 104

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. On August 16, Major General Ali Hammadi al-Musawi, the newly appointed chairman of the Basrah Security Committee, met with the Regional Coordinator (RC) and requested military equipment that he claimed was vital for him to stabilize Basrah. He said the key for him to succeed in his admittedly "hard mission" was weapons and training from the United States. He provided no details about how he would use the weapons and appeared to have no action plan for wresting control of the province from the militias. The general responded to the RC's attempts to glean concrete information with broad vague declarations that he would be "strict, strong and unbiased" in combating armed militias attached to political parties. End Summary.

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DO YOU SUPPORT ME? HERE'S WHAT I NEED  
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¶12. (C) The RC met with General Hammadi on August 16 to discuss his mandate and his relations with local politicians. The general said that, after several days of publicly voiced declarations of non-cooperation from the Basrah Provincial Council (BPC), he received assurances of full support from the BPC on August 15. Turning to his main theme, the general told the RC that it is not "logical" for the government forces under his command to be less well armed than the militias. Without any discussion of his plan to increase security, he requested AK-47s, other small arms, armored vehicles, binoculars, night goggles and training, saying a number of times that he had been disappointed by "empty promises" made by the United States. The RC tried unsuccessfully to get the general to clarify what he meant by "empty promises" and to draw out from him an explanation of his plan of action. The general replied that he would lead the security effort for the benefit of the country and block interference from political parties. The RC assured the general that he would make no empty promises and added that the USG needed to see in writing the general's action plan before his requests could be considered.

¶13. (C) The RC asked the general for details about how he would deal with the Basrah police, who are infiltrated by militias and allegedly are carrying out assassinations, kidnappings and other forms of intimidation with impunity (see Ref A). The general responded that high unemployment has driven young men to join militias where they are paid the equivalent of \$38 per month.

He said once foreign capital has been invested and the economy is again growing, the young men would leave the militias and become law-abiding citizens. He added that education was vital to eliminating police corruption -- another of the many non-sequiturs that peppered the meeting. The RC reminded the general that foreign investment would not come until security has been established. That prompted the general to return to his opening gambit, his need for vast arrays of U.S. weapons and training.

¶4. (C) Under probing from the RC, the general estimated that the stabilization of Basrah would take longer than the one-month term of the security committee, saying it could be extended. This is the second one-month emergency decree for Basrah since the end of May (see Ref B). Hammadi advised that Basrah could be stabilized in four to six months, provided his requests were filled from the USG and he was supported by the government. He claimed that he would have the authority to arrest senior politicians suspected of ordering violence once a judge had issued a warrant.

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ATTACK ON THE GOVERNORATE BUILDING

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¶5. (C) After repeated questions, the general provided information about a tribal attack that occurred on the Basrah government headquarters mid-day on August 16. He said members of the Bani Asad tribe staged a retaliatory attack against the Fadillah Party at the Basrah governorate building in retaliation for their suspected involvement in the murder of one of their leaders a few days earlier. General Hammadi said a curfew instituted earlier had now been lifted because the situation had returned to calm.

¶6. (C) Comment. The general made a less than sterling impression in his first meeting with the RC. With a slumped posture and a wheedling voice, his main topic was an unconvincing appeal for U.S. military support, and he was unable

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to explain how he would use it. He arrived for his meeting two hours late without calling ahead to advise of his delay. During the meeting, he took two calls on his mobile phone in which the haranguing voices of the callers were audible to everyone present in the room. The general lamely commented that he was under pressure to decide what to do with tribal members detained in fighting at the governorate building. He said if he allowed them to be released they would again cause problems but if he kept them locked up, their cohorts would stir up trouble to force their release. The general did not inspire confidence that he will fulfill his mission. End Comment.

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